

REMARKS

By this Amendment After Final, Applicants propose canceling claims 38-48 without prejudice or disclaimer and amending claim 1. No new matter has been added. Claims 1-37 are pending on the merits.

As an initial matter, Applicants appreciate the Examiner's indication that claims 3-5, 21, 22, and 24-30 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Final Office Action at 4. Applicants respectfully decline, however, to rewrite any of those claims in independent form at this time for the reasons outlined in more detail below.

In the final Office Action, the Examiner rejected claims 1, 2, 6-8, 14-16, 18-20, and 31-37 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Phillips (U.S. Patent No. 4,676,649); and rejected claims 9-13, 17, and 23 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Phillips in view of Sogard (U.S. Patent No. 6,402,380). Claim 1 is the only independent claim pending on the merits and it has been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) based on the Phillips reference. Applicants have amended independent claim 1 to more clearly define the invention. In the event that the Examiner may consider asserting a new claim rejection based on the Phillips reference, Applicants respectfully submit that such a rejection would be improper at least because that reference fails to disclose or suggest all of the subject matter recited in Applicants' amended independent claim 1.

Applicants' invention as recited in amended independent claim 1 is directed to a stage device including a base, and a stage positioned adjacent to the base and movable relative to the base. The stage device further includes a bearing assembly including at least one fluid bearing interposed between the base and the stage for

supporting the stage on the base and movable in two directions substantially orthogonal with respect to one another and independent of each of the base and the stage.

The Phillips reference fails to disclose or suggest at least a stage device including a bearing assembly including at least one fluid bearing interposed between a base and a stage for supporting the stage on the base and movable in two directions substantially orthogonal with respect to one another and independent of each of the base and the stage.

Applicants have found that in conventional stage assemblies, which use air bearings to support a stage, the bearings may be attached to either a base or to the stage. The air bearings thus travel with the stage over the entire base, which requires the base to have a surface at least as large as the diameter of the bearing plus the distance of travel of the stage. The Phillips reference discloses such bearings.

In contrast, since Applicants' claimed bearings move independent of each of the base and the stage, they may need to only travel half the distance of the total travel distance of the stage. As a result, the lower surface of the stage and the upper surface of the base over which the bearings travel may only need to be as large as the bearing diameter plus half the total travel distance of the stage, thereby allowing for a reduction in the overall size of the stage device.

In the final Office Action, the Examiner interprets the Phillips reference as disclosing "a base (16); a stage (11) positioned adjacent to the base and movable relative to the base; a bearing assembly (18) comprising at least one fluid/gas bearing interposed between the base and the stage for supporting the stage on the base and movable relative to the base and the stage (see figure 1)." Final Office Action at 2.

While the Phillips reference discloses a multi-axis gas bearing stage assembly including stabilized gas bearings 18, Applicants respectfully submit that they are not "movable in two directions substantially orthogonal with respect to one another and independent of each of the base and the stage," as recited in Applicants' amended independent claim 1. Since the Phillips reference does not disclose or suggest all of the subject matter recited in Applicants' amended independent claim 1, that claim is patentably distinguishable from Phillips.

The Examiner also rejected claims 9-13, 17, and 23 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Phillips in view of Sogard. Claims 9-13, 17, and 23 depend from allowable independent claim 1. Therefore, those dependent claims should be allowable for at least the same reasons amended independent claim 1 is allowable.

Conclusions

For at least the reasons set forth above, amended independent claim 1 should be allowable. Dependent claims 2-37 depend from amended independent claim 1. Consequently, those dependent claims should be allowable for at least the same reasons claim 1 is allowable.

Applicants respectfully request entry of this Amendment After Final, reconsideration and withdrawal of the outstanding claim rejections, and allowance of claims 1-37.

If the Examiner believes that a telephone conversation might advance prosecution of this application, the Examiner is cordially invited to call Applicants' undersigned attorney at 571-203-2739.

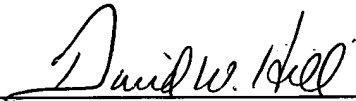
Applicants respectfully submit that the final Office Action contains numerous assertions concerning the related art and the claims. Regardless of whether those assertions are addressed specifically herein, Applicants respectfully decline to automatically subscribe to them.

Please grant any extensions of time required to enter this response and charge any additional required fees to our Deposit Account No. 6-0916.

Respectfully submitted,

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